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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7734
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0748
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7736
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5922
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4264
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1858
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4268
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3364
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8347
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5830
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0542
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2629
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000197

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2017

TAGS: PTER PGOV PHUM MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: BOMB BLASTS IN COLOMBO SUBURB AND
BATTICALOA

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE, JR. REASONS:
1.4(b,d).

¶1. (SBU) On February 23, a bomb blast injured 18 people at a bus stop in Mount Lavinia, a southern suburb of Colombo. According to press reports, a passenger who spotted an unattended parcel in the back of the bus alerted the driver, who evacuated the bus just before the explosion. Eight Tamils and 3 Sinhalese have been detained in connection with the blast. According to some passengers, the parcel had been in the hands of a boy of about 10 years who was accompanied by a woman. The woman and boy reportedly got off the bus before the parcel was discovered. The Free Media Movement reported that a Senior Inspector of the Mount Lavinia police abused and assaulted a journalist who was on the scene of the bomb blast.

¶2. (SBU) No one has claimed responsibility for the Mt. Lavinia bus bomb. If it was the work of the LTTE, it could have been in retaliation for the Sri Lankan Air Force's aerial bombardment of a coastal area on February 22. TamilNet reported that the LTTE vowed to retaliate for the February 22 attack on what it claims was a fishing village. The SLAF says it targeted and hit a hiding place for LTTE suicide and logistics boats.

¶3. (U) On February 24 in Batticaloa, 2 TMVP ("Pillaiyan group") activists were killed and one civilian wounded in a blast; authorities have not yet determined whether the blast was a suicide bomb or a claymore mine. The blast occurred hours before a TMVP rally in Kaluwanachikudi, which was to be attended by senior TMVP candidates in the upcoming local elections.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The method reportedly used in the bus bombing in Mt. Lavinia appears consistent with suspected LTTE attacks. However, in the murky atmosphere surrounding terrorist incidents in Sri Lanka, where perpetrators are rarely brought to justice, the fortunate identification of the bus bomb in Mt. Lavinia and just-in-time evacuation of

the bus has raised suspicion among some that authorities may have arranged the incident. There is also some speculation that the Sinhalese nationalist JVP may have been involved. The Batticaloa blast is a possible indication of continued LTTE activity in the area. If the Batticaloa incident was in fact a suicide attack, it would be the first in the East since the government re-captured the province from the LTTE in July 2007. It remains unclear whether the TMVP activists killed were the intended target, or whether the bomber was prevented from proceeding to a higher-value objective, the TMVP political rally.

BLAKE